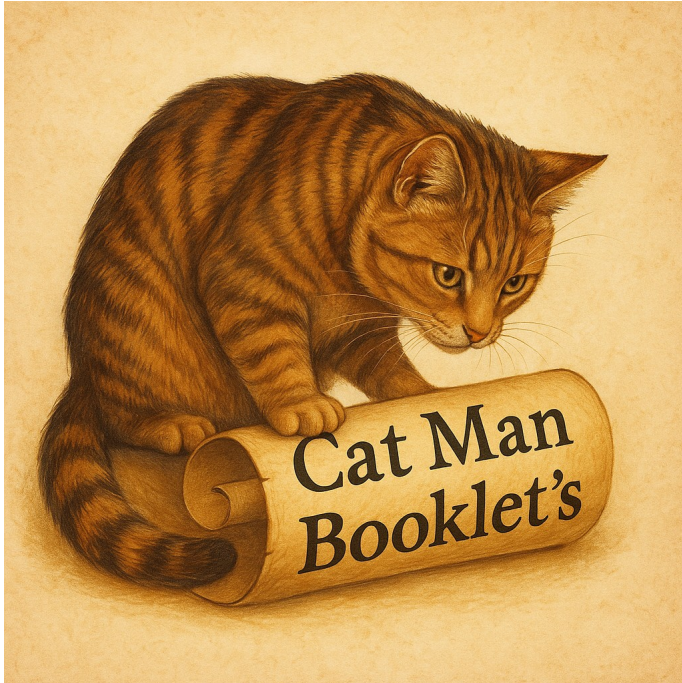




China Called Its Cat Mao

Cat Man (Booklet's)



Hrsg: Cat Man (Booklet's)
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China Called Its Cat Mao

The cat drank peppermint tea,
Now it has fallen into a blissful sleep,
The shade of the flowers is a little paradise for her,
If it can catch lots of rats for us
and many mice for us,
Let us let her sleep then.

„The Drunken Cat“

The dog wages war against the cat. The cat wages war against the mouse. And a scientist, fully aware of the correctness of his conviction, wages war against another scientist, who in turn is firmly convinced of the correctness of his own theories. Fortunately, such wars among scholars are conducted in a civilized and chivalrous manner: scholars do not eat each other, they generally do not bite each other, and no one has ever heard of them scratching each other. But they contradict each other, they criticize each other, they fight with words.

Such a scholarly dispute has been raging for a long time about the history of the Chinese cat, and it continues today. Since when have there been cats in China? Was the cat brought to China from Egypt? Or did the Chinese themselves tame a native, small wild cat? These are the questions that are discussed in this debate and to which new answers are constantly being given.

How, when, and where did Mao, the mysterious cat of China, make its first appearance?

One possibility is that the Chinese "imported" the cat during their travels to Egypt via the Silk Road. But we must doubt this! After all, the inhabitants of the Nile Valley were forbidden to give away or "export" sacred cats — forbidden with the utmost severity of the law. Not even the most beautiful Chinese silk would have persuaded the Egyptians to part with their sacred Mau. For them, Mau was simply not an object of trade.

Mao and Hu

We know nothing definite about the origin of the Chinese cat, but we do know something about the origin of the Chinese word for cat, "Mao." Fortunately, we do not need to get into any disputes about this.

The word "Mao" appears in Chinese literature for the first time around 800 BC, the time of King Hsüan, in an ode that sings the praises of the homeland of a young princess named Han-k'i:

Han is a beautiful, lovely land
With its streams and rivers,
With its forests, its bears and giant bears,
With its Mao and its Hu.

Here it is, the word "Mao," next to the word "Hu."

Who is Hu? He is the sacred tiger who, together with the sacred cat, protected the fruits of the fields and farmlands from pests in ancient China. Mao devoured the mice, Hu the harmful wild boars; for it was not only mice and rats, but also wild boars that repeatedly robbed Chinese farmers of the fruits of their labor. That is why Mao and Hu, the protectors of the harvest, were held in the highest esteem, celebrated in poems, and honored in various customs.

Apparently, no one was afraid of tigers, and they were not dangerous to humans. It was probably easier for tigers to catch wild boars, which were also a tastier food for spoiled tiger palates than human flesh — and perhaps even easier to digest.

But what does the word "Mao" actually mean? Of course, it is an onomatopoeic imitation of the sound a cat makes, like the Egyptian "Mau." However, the Chinese word "miao" also means "grain."

To Chinese ears, therefore, the cat constantly says "grain, grain, grain" when it meows. The cat constantly names the object it cares for and for which it is kept. That is why the sound of the cat easily became associated with the word "miao" to form the name "Mao." However, the character for "Mao" is a combination of the characters for "field" (T'ien), "grass" (T'sao), and "monster, villain" (Chài), because cats chase monsters and villains away from the fields.

In Chinese, the sound sequence "mao" also means "eighty years old." The cat has therefore become a symbol of longevity in China. Cats are often seen on Chinese birthday, wedding, or family anniversary greeting cards, expressing the wish that those being celebrated may reach a ripe old age. The symbolic image for a 70th birthday is a cat chasing a butterfly, which means: "May the 70-year-old live to be 80." A rock, a chrysanthemum, a butterfly, and a cat, all united in one picture, mean: "May your age reach 70, 80 years."

Useful Animals and Totemism

Useful animals are highly valued by almost all peoples of the world. Not only do humans breed and care for the animals that help them in their struggle for life, they also often turn these helpers into gods to whom they make sacrifices, whom they worship and to whom they pay homage. Often, such domestic animals were also kept purely out of love. They went from being comrades-in-arms to lap animals and household friends, from whom nothing more was expected than that they be receptive to flattery.

Most animal cults have their origins in mythical ideas about mysterious connections between humans and animals. The belief in such connections and the cult that arises from it is called totemism. Native Americans, South African and South Sea Island tribes, and other peoples chose certain animal species as their totems.



They then felt a special connection to the animal in question—perhaps because of its characteristics, perhaps because of its appearance—and respected it as a member of their tribe. People who belonged to the same totem, who worshipped the same animal species, considered themselves relatives who owed each other mutual assistance in all difficulties and dangers. Everyone was also jointly responsible for the deeds—and misdeeds—of their totem companions. This ensured a certain moral order and led to individuals showing consideration for their fellow human beings, at least those of their totem.

Incidentally, the word totem comes from the language of the North American Chipewyan Indians, where it is “ototeman,” meaning “brother-sister kinship.” Totemic beliefs are a form of animism, the religious belief that the entire environment of humans, indeed all of nature, is animated. Not only animals and plants, but also inanimate objects, mountains and stones, rivers and lakes, the sun and moon, wind and lightning, rain and fog have souls in the animistic world of ideas. Animals, especially those close to humans, have human souls. It is not uncommon for pets to house the souls of one’s own ancestors. It is therefore imperative to treat these animals with the utmost respect.

The ancient Chinese also believed this. They loved animals like no other people. They believed that animals were basically transformed humans, that after death, the human soul slipped into the body of an animal, a bear, a

hawk, a tiger, or a cat. Fortunately, no one claimed to know which human had been transformed into which animal. Otherwise, some animals would have fared badly!

Otherwise, one Chinese person might have assumed that a tiger was his former evil neighbor Lu, while another Chinese person might have taken revenge on a bear for transforming into the former usurer Pei Ching, who collected interest and compound interest, and a third person might have discovered his cunning deceased mother-in-law behind the good cat!

But since no one knew who was hiding in which animal, the only precautionary measure was to show reverence to all animals. During the Hía, Shang, and Chou dynasties, until about 200 BC, strange rituals were performed to honor the cat and the tiger.

The Wild Cat on the Roof

These mysterious views on the relationship between humans and animals still have an impact in China today. This is illustrated by the story of a Chinese man who heard strange noises on the roof of his house every night.

He was worried and feared that a demon had taken up residence with him and was now tormenting him for past sins. The poor Chinese man trembled with fear every time he heard the noise on the roof. But he pulled himself together and decided to investigate.

In his excitement, however, he was unable to climb onto the roof quietly and carefully, but behaved so clumsily that the cause of the noise had of course long since disappeared by the time he appeared at the top. And that was further proof to the Chinese man that he was dealing with a nasty demon.

The poor man no longer felt comfortable in his own skin, and he no longer felt comfortable in his house. He decided to sell the house as soon as possible and move to another, demon-free area. However, he found no one who would buy his house. Everyone had heard about the “demon noise” and everyone was terrified of it.

After many years of torment, when the homeowner had become very ill and emaciated, a foreigner came to town, a missionary. He heard that there was a house with a malicious demon and that the owner wanted to get rid of it.

The missionary thought he would relieve the tormented man of his suffering and bought the house. But on the very first night, he too heard the noise. He assumed it came from rats or nesting birds. In any case, he told himself, he would deal with the “demon.” He cautiously crept onto the roof. And what did he see there? Two green eyes belonging to a beautiful cat shining back at him. The animal was so beautiful that he stood still, spellbound, admiring it; but it scurried away.

The cat that the missionary had spotted on the roof of his house, this “demon,” was a wildcat. It never showed itself during the day. Only when night fell did it seek out a warm place to sleep near humans. And before dawn, it set off again for its hunting grounds.

Mao and Li

In ancient China, the wild cat was called “Li.” The question now is whether “Mao” is a descendant of “Li” or whether Mao came to China from Egypt. In any case, the wild cat Li also differed in appearance from the domestic cat Mao. The Chinese say that a Mao has the body of a wild cat but the head of a tiger. As early as the sixth century BC, it was said: “Mao resembles a tiger, but is small. It is kept as a pet by humans to catch mice. Li is a larger cat. Instead of being useful, it often steals people’s chickens.”

The cry of the wild cat also sounds very different from that of the domesticated cat. Later, however, domestic cats often mated with their wild relatives. The offspring of such unions were still semi-wild in their habits and inclinations. In one respect, however, there was no difference between the wild Li and the tame Mao: in their behavior toward mice.

It is quite possible that the Chinese themselves accustomed the wild cat to living in the house. The Chinese have always had an extraordinary talent for



breeding and taming wild animals. It was the Chinese, for example, who began to keep and breed pigs as domestic animals. And the Chinese certainly recognized the usefulness of cats early on: they had always been farmers and vegetable growers and had to struggle year after year with the danger of being cheated out of the fruits of their labor, the fruits of their fields and gardens.

It was precisely the Chinese's constant concern for their grain and their natural talent as animal breeders that may have given them the idea of making the natural enemy of the voracious rodents, the wild cat, useful and subservient. In addition, as the story of the cat on the roof shows, wild cats often lived in cities, and it probably wasn't too difficult to catch a few.

Another circumstance suggests that the Chinese domesticated the cat themselves: Chinese domestic cats, like Chinese wildcats, have drooping ears. Incidentally, very few domestic animals have a single origin. Most were "invented" in different places. If the theory of the independent domestication of cats by the Chinese is correct, then the domestic cat comes from at least two wild breeds: the Nubian African wildcat and the smaller Chinese wildcat.

In ancient China, there were an incredible number of rats, but not nearly enough cats to eat them all. Cats were therefore an expensive commodity. Cats were also bought for their beauty, to adorn the household. Chinese cat

buyers appreciated their grace, their elegant movements, their silky soft fur, and their mysterious eyes. However, the decisive factor for them was a cat's skill as a rat catcher.

Anyone who wanted to buy a good cat in ancient China had to go to a cat dealer. The dealer offered animals of various ages and qualities for sale at the market, or wandered through the streets with a large basket full of cats, touting his meowing wares. He knew he had to reckon with discerning, sharp-eyed customers who examined and assessed each cat meticulously before buying it.

Every Chinese person knew how to accurately assess a cat based on characteristics that we Europeans would generally completely overlook. In ancient China, there were people who made a name for themselves as particularly talented cat connoisseurs, who, as true cat experts, provided information for a fee. One of the most famous cat experts lived in Chengtu on T'itu Street and called himself Teh-Paz'-tzse. This man, who later became legendary among Chinese cat lovers, was said to be able to tell at first glance and with the naked eye whether an animal was first-class and whether it would later be loyal to its buyer.

Cat buyers who were not so savvy that they could see through a cat's character at a glance took a long list of criteria into account when looking for a good cat. A Mao

with a short body but a tiger's head was considered a good mouse catcher. Its tail had to be at least as long as its torso, measured from the base of the tail to the nape of the neck. The Chinese say that this type of cat has a "developed business sense." This meant that such a cat would repay its owner for everything he did for it by catching an appropriate number of rats and mice in return. Animals with a long and loosely built body were called "wanderers." It was said that the long-headed ones preferred to chase chickens instead of doing their actual work properly.

When buying a cat, it is also important to look inside its mouth. In China, this was even done with a gifted cat, at least as soon as the giver was no longer present, although the saying "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth" also applied in China. According to the Chinese, the rough lines on a cat's palate say a lot about the cat's value. The best cats, it was said, have nine lines, the next best seven, and the worst only five. Cats with five lines hunt mice and rats for only three months of the year; those with seven lines for half a year; but those with nine lines, the good ones, hunt throughout the whole long year. Lucky owners.

Perhaps it should be emphasized (in case you, dear reader, want to test your own cat's palate) that examining a cat's palate requires a certain amount of caution and, above all, practice in handling cats. This is because cats do not always keep still when you try to open their

mouths wide. A cat that allows you to look into its mouth at all is certainly already a good cat.

Another Chinese tip for assessing a cat: if you have the opportunity, listen to it while it is sleeping. Snoring cats are usually good hunters; the louder a cat snores, the greater its hunting instinct. And if you don't have to share your bedroom with such a snoring cat, this sure sign of a good hunting instinct won't rob you of your healthy sleep. It was also said that a good Mao should have a moist, cold nose all year round. Only for a very short period in summer should the nose feel warm. The muzzle should be evenly red and should not have any black spots.

Another important criterion: when the cat is standing on all fours, its claws should not be visible. Those that show their claws even when standing roam around on the roofs at night and damage not only their masters' tiles, but also those of their neighbors. In the best cat breed, it is said, the bones of the tail are not completely round, but slightly flattened. The city of Songpan, located in the far northwest of Sezuán, was known for a breed of cat that had these "good tails." But there are other things to consider when it comes to this part of the body: when you stroke a Mao, its tail should stand straight up.

When the cat sniffs its prey, its tail should wag gently but clearly and cheerfully. A long, fine cat's tail is ideal; a thick, inflexible tail, on the other hand, suggests that the animal is lazy and useless.



Although the Chinese judge their cats according to their usefulness, they were far from disregarding their beauty. Nothing else could be expected from a people whose country was called the “Kingdom of Flowers.”

The Chinese find pleasure in their cats where every lover’s love is kindled: in the eyes. In China, they say that a cat’s eyes are yellow like gold, shiny like silver, and clear like the sparkling water of a stream. The color of these eyes is called Kin-Yin-Seh, which means “gold and silver color.” But the Chinese also pay close attention to the cat’s ears: they should be long and thick. Good ears should always move slightly when walking, as if the cat were constantly ready to pounce on its prey at any moment.

If an animal has thin ears, it is a sign that it does not tolerate the cold well. According to Chinese observation, a cat that has eaten many mice develops pointed, jagged ears, as does a tiger that has eaten humans. A cat’s whiskers should be stiff and numerous, and its coat should be colorful. Nevertheless, single-colored cats are also prized in China. The most sought-after cats are called “black cloud over the snow”; their neck and chest are white, their nape and back are black. Another very popular breed is completely white with a black tail; it is called Sueh-Li-o’-Chian.

The list of good and bad omens to look out for when buying a cat in China could go on forever. Some of these

omens are certainly based on generations of Chinese experience with cats and are likely to be accurate. Others cannot be so easily proven. For example, it was said that colorful legs were a bad omen. It was also considered bad luck if a cat had a few long hairs above its ankles; such cats were said to be unfaithful and would repeatedly stay away from their owner's house for long periods of time.

Three hairs above the ankle meant that the cat would always come home at three o'clock in the morning, four hairs meant four o'clock, five hairs meant five o'clock, and so on.

After considering all the factors involved in purchasing a good cat, and given the high price that had to be paid for a flawless specimen, Chinese cat owners soon faced a new delicate task: how could they keep their precious cats in the house. Reclaiming a cat that had moved to another house was not possible in ancient China. If a cat went to a new owner, the latter considered it a gift that no one could reclaim from him. This custom went so far that the owner of a cat forfeited his ownership rights if his animal strayed over the neighbor's roof or otherwise left his property. No wonder the Chinese used to keep their cats on strings or attach weights to them so that they couldn't run away so easily.

The Chinese believed that a very good cat possessed the magical powers of a sorcerer. The mere presence of such a cat was enough to scare away all rats and mice. A

“magic cat” did not even need to hunt; its presence drove away all rodents within a wide radius. If it entered a room where rats and mice had been scurrying around until that moment, the uninvited guests immediately became quiet as mice in the hope of not being discovered. If, on the other hand, an inferior cat entered the room, the mice and rats remained unfazed and did not even stop eating and scurrying around. The little rascals seemed to immediately sense which cats could be dangerous to them; according to the Chinese, they could smell the degree of danger from the oily scent on the soles of the cats’ paws. Black soles and paws, such as those of wild cats, were preferable to white or black-and-white ones, and they should always feel a little damp and oily, even on a domestic cat.

Kinechownan was the city that enjoyed the highest reputation in the ancient Chinese empire for breeding the best cats, true “magic cats.” It was said that the cats of Kinechownan were so clever that they no longer needed to use their lightness, speed, and strength. For example, if there was more than one hole in a room through which rats and mice could enter and exit, the cunning Kinechownan Mao would cover all the holes with stones or other objects it had at hand, except for one: it would then lie in wait patiently and confident of victory until its prey came sooner or later. It was also said that the cats of the city of Kinechownan were even good at math: using lines they scratched into the ground with their claws, they calculated with a very special “formula” where and how

far away the nearest rodent must be. The magical cats of Kinechownan also mastered the strategy for capturing a sausage to perfection, as can be learned from Chinese stories.

The cat lies sleepily in its corner and shows not the slightest interest in the sausage on the table; on the contrary, it acts as if it couldn't care less about the sausage. But as soon as the master of the house leaves the room for even a moment, she jumps – whoosh – onto the table, and the sausage disappears. When the master returns, the only clue he has to what has happened is the cat's innocent paw-licking.

Apparently, all of our cats today have adopted this technique of stealing sausages from their famous ancestors from Kinechownan. However, well-fed Chinese cats, like their European relatives, can be trained to live in peace with pigeons, chickens, and ornamental birds.

Peppermint Baths

From time to time, the Chinese bathe their beloved Mao. But Mao, like his fellow cats around the world, does not like bath water at all. Not because he doesn't like to wash. He washes himself several times a day with his own rough tongue. But because bathing water is not necessary for cleanliness. At most, you can catch a cold in the bath and possibly even die. That is Mao's opinion. Tigers, leopards, and jaguars have often been observed taking a

員外堂
廿八日
吉章



bath in a river with great joy and visibly enjoying it. But that was in tropical regions. China, however, is not a tropical country.

Nevertheless, the Chinese bathe their cats. And because they know that their pets don't appreciate it and that it could even be dangerous for them, they take very special precautions. They outsmart their cats by generously sprinkling a few handfuls of peppermint flowers and leaves into the bath water. Then Mao no longer resists the bath with claws and teeth, but becomes intoxicated by the wonderful scents emanating from the bath water, possibly even splashing into the water voluntarily and finally letting everything happen to him, so enchanted is he by the fragrance of the spicy peppermint. After the bath, Mao is carefully rubbed dry and not allowed outside until he is completely dry, rubbed with hay mixed with peach blossoms: a good Chinese recipe against cat fleas.

Mao as Clock and Calendar

Mao not only saved the Chinese from the plague of rats and mice, he also served as their timekeeper. The Chinese observed that cats' eyes can not only spot their master or prey from afar, but also change depending on the time of day: if the cat's pupil is a narrow line, it is noon. If it resembles a date stone, it is morning or afternoon. At night, however, the pupil is full and round. This clock is not accurate to the minute, but back then, when there

were no airplanes, high-speed trains, or cars pushing for punctuality, that wasn't so important.

The cat's eye as an indicator of the time of day once played an important role in the interpretation of a work of art. A famous Chinese statesman and historian named Ou-Yuang (died 1072 AD) owned a painting depicting a bouquet of peonies with a cat sitting underneath it. For many years, no one was able to interpret this painting. It was known that cats have a fondness for valerian and peppermint, but no one had ever heard that they particularly appreciate peonies. So the painting remained a mystery. One day, a friend came to visit Ou-Yuang. He was a witty art connoisseur, and he studied the strange painting attentively for a long time. He noticed that the flowers had opened their calyxes wide and were almost past their prime. It seemed as if these flowers had been placed in the midday heat. This assumption was confirmed by the cat's eyes: its pupils were narrow slits. But peonies at midday meant the highest degree of nobility in the symbolic language of Chinese art.

The cat was also valuable to the Chinese as a calendar. In China, the month was divided into three periods of ten days each, and these periods were called Hsuin. The Chinese observed that in the first Hsuin, the cat begins to eat the captured mouse by the head or neck, in the second Hsuin it grabs it by the back, and in the third Hsuin it first devours the rear part of the mouse. In this way, when

observing a cat eating a mouse, one can always immediately determine what part of the month it is.

Cats were often painted in Chinese art or modeled in porcelain. These depictions are often so lifelike that they had an astonishing effect. If you lit a small light inside a modeled cat's head and illuminated its pupils, the rats fled from this porcelain Mao as if it were a real cat.

Incidentally, China is proud of its own "Cat Raphael," as the Swiss painter Gottfried Mind was called. His name was Li-Ai-Chih and he lived in Hua-Yin, a small town in Shensi province. He left behind magnificent cat paintings, which were once kept in an imperial collection from the 12th century. However, after the rebels, who called themselves "rats" at the time, came to power, these paintings were destroyed. The rebels probably could not forget all the suffering and hardship that the emperor's soldiers and officers, known as "the cats," had inflicted on them in the past, so in their blind rage they destroyed everything that reminded them of their enemies.

The Cat in Chinese Superstition

Unlike in some other regions and countries, there were few superstitious practices in China that were detrimental or even life-threatening to cats. Nevertheless, some superstitious beliefs associated with cats have been handed down to us.

For example, the Chinese believed that you only had to rub a cat with a piece of bamboo if you wanted it to have kittens. Furthermore, Professor de Groot, an expert on Chinese and Japanese cultural history, reports that the Chinese used to believe that a cat that walked over a deathbed of its own accord would cause the corpse to rise again; but anyone who was then touched by this resurrected person would die instantly.

There was only one sure way to avert this danger: the corpse had to be pushed back onto the deathbed with a pole or a broom.

A variation of this superstition says that every tiger and possibly every cat has a miraculous hair in its tail that can conjure the soul of a dead person back into the body.

Therefore, it is advisable, especially on tiger days – according to the Chinese calendar – not to tolerate cats near a corpse.

Punishment and Miracles

Another story tells of something strange and macabre in connection with cats. The Chinese Chu Pe'i experienced in a drastic way that any cruelty to a cat will sooner or later be avenged.

Chu Pe'i was an enthusiastic pigeon breeder. His pigeons were colorful and beautiful and were called "wood pigeons." Chu Pe'i built them a cage out of bamboo. When Chu Pe'i had one hundred pigeons, his cat, who



knew nothing about pigeon breeding but knew something about eating pigeons, thought to herself: “There are so many of them – I can surely risk letting one disappear unnoticed for a private little feast.” And so the cat stole one of the pigeons and ate it, along with its colorful, beautiful feathers.

But Chu Pe’i soon discovered that a thief had broken into his pigeon cage, and he also soon found out who the thief had been. His anger was immeasurable, and he cut off all four of the cat’s paws, so that it soon died in agony. Soon, however, another cat stole one of Chu Pe’i’s pigeons. But she too was mutilated and had to pay for her actions with her life. Ten cats, maybe more, who had targeted Chu Pe’i’s pigeons, suffered the same fate one after the other. But heaven’s revenge was not long in coming. Chu Pe’i’s wife gave birth twice in a row to children who were missing hands and feet.

Even stranger is the fifteenth-century legend of a miracle cat from Tibet. This cat was sent to China as a tribute and was more than a “magic cat”: it was a “cat king.”

Wherever this “cat king” went, the mice of the whole area immediately gathered around him and died a voluntary death. At least, that is what the Tibetan envoys claimed when they presented this “cat king” to the Emperor of China as a tribute. However, the emperor did not quite trust the story and wanted proof. So the Tibetans locked their miracle Mao in a cage and left him alone overnight.

The next morning, when they checked on him together with the emperor, countless mice lay still, stiff, and dead around the cage at the feet of the “Cat King.”

Another anecdote, one from the land of Sezuan, tells of a miraculous healing. A farmer whose eye was very sick sought out a well-known doctor. The doctor determined that the eye could not be saved. He removed it and replaced it with a cat’s eye. The operation was successful to everyone’s satisfaction; the patient was soon able to see again. After some time, the doctor asked the farmer if the new eye was causing him any problems. The farmer replied that he could see perfectly well with it, but that it was causing him other problems: at night he could not close it because it insisted on staying open and looking out for rats, and he therefore often found it difficult to sleep. The eye had obviously belonged to a cat with a particularly high and unwavering professional ethic.

Another story worth mentioning tells of the coexistence between Chinese cats and rats. The annals of the T’zmg dynasty record that in 742, in the Wei Valley, young cats and young rats were fed the same milk. When they grew up, they lived together as friends in perfect harmony and blissful peace. It could be that this story is meaningful and calls for harmony. In China, robbers and rebels were called “rats,” while those loyal to the emperor were called “cats.” It was said that the “cats” would starve and die if there were no more “rats,” just as real cats would starve if there were no more real rats. Perhaps the story of the

friendship between cats and rats was meant to convey that it should be possible for people nourished by the same soil to live together in peace.

Faithful Mao

Particularly indicative of the relationship between cats and humans in ancient China is a report from the chronicle of the city of Chin-an-fu. It is reminiscent of the Western story of the faithful poodle who starved to death on his master's grave. In Chinese history, the faithful friend who dies of grief is not a poodle, but a Mao. Yes, Mao, the cat, which in the West was still reviled as false, treacherous, and disloyal at that time, mourned the loss of its master in China. Why is the Chinese cat so loyal?

Probably because the Chinese understand their cats and respond to them completely – because they do not feel the urge to always be rulers and tyrants over their animals. They know that Mao does great things for them, and they love and respect him for it. And that is why Mao also loves and respects his master, remains loyal to him throughout his life and follows him to his death.

Tempora mutantur!

But times are changing in China too. When Chinese culture slowly began to crumble and so-called civilization was imported, some Chinese began to regard their friends and helpers as delicacies: they put Mao in chains and

fattened him up with rice so they could eat him as a roast. From sacred animal to fattened animal – times are truly changing.

But we don't want to end this chapter on a sad note. It is more enjoyable to recall the collection of cat paintings by Li-Ai-Chih from the twelfth century. This collection included a group of eighteen cat paintings with titles such as Playing Cats, Chicks with Cats, Intoxicated Cats, and Sleeping Cats. The painter had obviously observed cats that had just emerged, still somewhat dazed, from an intoxicating peppermint bath.

Two poets of the Kin dynasty were so enthusiastic about these paintings after visiting the art collection that they sang their praises in poems. One of these poems, the one about the peppermint-drunk cat, is at the beginning of this chapter. We will place the second, which sings the praises of the sleeping Mao, at the end.

Sitting in front of the mouse hole,
the cat has spent a lot of time.

Now it lies on its side
and sleeps contentedly.

I, the poet, believe that the Heavenly Painter
lovingly observed all this
under the peonies, at sunset.

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Guoshanhuang – The mythical mountain guardian of China

For your notes

For your notes



Cat Man (Booklet's)